# NAPA COUNTY

## COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

ALBERT J. HABERGER
County Administrator

1115 FIRST STREET · NAPA, CALIFORNIA 94558
AREA CODE 707/253-4421

NEWS SUMMARY

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SUBJECT: New Approach to Local Criminal Justice Management

FROM: Albert J. Haberger, County Administrator
Napa County, California



A new approach to managing local criminal justice costs and to coordinating criminal justice agencies has been launched by the County of Napa, California, a county of some 90,000 citizens in the wine-producing region north of San Francisco.

Aside from schools, the criminal justice system is the major single user of property tax revenues in this County and continues to be one of the fastest growing areas of County government expenditure. According to Napa County Administrator Albert J. Haberger, the related functions of law enforcement, prosecution, the courts, the public defender, detention, and probation together employ 27 percent of the County staff, and though these functions account for only 12 percent of the total County budget, they absorb over 26 percent of the property tax revenue which the County government raises. (This is in addition to the property tax levied by incorporated cities to support the provision of police services). Because the criminal justice system relies so heavily on the local property tax, changes in the cost of operation, whether they be increases or savings, have a very direct impact on the local tax burden and the local economy.

Although numerous alternatives to the traditional and ever-more-expensive criminal justice process have been proposed in recent years for dealing with the less

serious offenders, the implementation of real functional and organizational changes in the criminal justice system itself faces formidable obstacles, Haberger noted. Chief among these are the statuatory limits placed on criminal justice managers -- judges, sheriffs and police chiefs, district attorneys, public defenders, and probation officers -- which all but force them to work separately from one another in carrying out responsibilities in different parts of the criminal justice process. Seldom do these managers work together in the kind of comprehensive team effort needed to institute important system-wide organizational changes leading to cost savings and improved services.

Not only functional reorganization, but even a cooperative approach to problem-solving is made difficult by the fact that, within incorporated city boundaries, the criminal justice system is divided between city and county jurisdictions which have separate mandates and responsibilities. Even within County government, several criminal justice management positions are elected offices, and holders of these officers often feel that they are responsible only to the electorate and only for their separate functions. This is a barrier to a united management approach to system-wide problems.

In the County of Napa, in order to break through obstacles to cooperative planning and management, and in order to develop effective programs that reduce the cost of the criminal justice process, a Criminal Justice Planning Committee was created in 1975 as a forum for development of an integrated network of local criminal justice services. Members of the Committee are the County Sheriff, District Attorney, County Administrator, the local Superior and Municipal Court judges, the Chief Probation Officer, and all the City Police Chiefs in the County. Staffed by a professional

criminal justice planner and funded by a grant from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, this joint planning body identifies problems in the area of criminal justice, develops solutions, and reviews programs. In this way, new strategies and programs are perceived as joint undertakings in which all the various departments have a stake. In the context of a team effort, innovative, non-traditional approaches to criminal justice can succeed, while at the same time each criminal justice manager can continue to fulfill his or her respective statuatory responsibilities.

The first major result of Napa County's integrated approach to criminal justice management and planning was the establishment in 1975 of an independent Department of Corrections to operate the new Napa County jail, which opened in 1976. Managed separately from the Sheriff's Department, the Department of Corrections is headed by an appointed department head accountable to the County Administrator and the Board of Supervisors.

At the same time, in order to achieve the active participation of other criminal justice agencies, the County created a Bureau of Corrections with strong advisory and recommendatory powers concerning correctional policy and the development of an integrated network of correctional services. The Bureau consists of the County Sheriff, the District Attorney, the Chief Probation Officer (who chairs the Bureau), and a representative of the Chiefs of Police of the local incorporated cities, with local judges and the criminal justice planner as ex-officio members.

In planning the Department of Corrections, the major problem identified by the Criminal Justice Planning Committee was that too much of the effort of the criminal justice system was being focussed on minor offenders. The same expensive process of

of arrest, booking, detention, trial, sentenced incarceration, and probation was being lavished on, for example, first offender drunk drivers, as upon suspects accused of major felonies, according to Bureau of Corrections Chairman Helen Hotelling. The resources of the criminal justice system were being diverted from one of its major tasks -- the identification, confinement, and rehabilitation of offenders who are a serious threat to society.

The overall strategy that Napa County has developed in response has been first, to divert lesser offenders from as much of the criminal justice process as is practicable; second, to reserve incarceration as much as possible for more serious offenders; and third, to make the jail not a dumping ground, but a positive place where existing social services are brought to bear effectively to aid the offender and his or her family.

Diversion tactics include citing rather than booking drunk driving offenders; routine review of eligibility for release on own recognizance during the booking process; court release on own recognizance; and sentencing minor offenders to fines, probation, and/or public works programs, rather than to short jail terms. In addition, the local courts operate efficiently, so that there is little in-custody backlog. The combined result is that, while the criminal justice process as a whole continues to some extent to be disproportionately burdened with minor cases, the incarceration phase is able to concentrate on the recidivist and the more serious offender and to capture those offenders' attention while they are still at the primary level of the corrections system. In the Napa County jail, the average stay for presentenced

prisoners, including all cases, is three to four days, while two thirds of the prisoner population are sentenced prisoners serving an average term of six months.

The new maximum security Napa County jail and its operation have been designed to make incarceration a correctional rather than an embittering experience for the inmate. The jail has less than the usual jail atmosphere: it is carpeted and painted in warm colors; a special plastic replaces bars on the windows; and individual cells are grouped around day-rooms for privacy and for the prisoners' safety. Correctional officers are professionals, experienced and trained in their own field. More than simply prison guards, they take a more informal, personal, and caring approach to inmates than is traditional, according to Brenda Hippard, Acting Director of Corrections.

This approach, reflected in the officers' informal uniforms and by the low-key atmosphere in the jail, encourages prisoners to open up and deal with their problems, while at the same time security and control are maintained. In addition, male and female staff share in work assignments dealing with all prisoners. Early indications are that the presence of female officers has a settling effect on the male prisoners, particularly during the booking process.

Work-furlough and education-furlough programs are being developed and implemented on a small pilot basis, and other programs and policies are being developed to maintain and improve the inmates' links with the community, in part through the use of interns and volunteers. This further reduces both the social and governmental costs of incarceration. Further savings are achieved by providing services to inmates through existing County services, rather than setting up new services within the correctional system. Thus the County library, Mental Health Services, Public Health Services, Social Services (Welfare), and the local community college are all involved

in providing services during and after incarceration to the offenders and/or their families. This approach encourages continuity of treatment services after release from jail.

Similar efforts have been made to ensure that the jail, its operations, and its inmates do not become unduly isolated from the community at large. Citizens' advisory groups were deeply involved in the planning and design of the jail before its construction. Before the jail opened in February, 1976, a three-day "Community Booking and Detention Experience" allowed 135 volunteer "prisoners," including community leaders, media representatives, and other citizens, to spend the night in the new jail and experience the process of booking and detention (the experience also allowed for training of the new staff and for an invaluable shake-down of the new facility). Ongoing community participation in the corrections process includes a contract with a local non-profit volunteer center to provide volunteer aides in corrections, in probation, and in victim's services.

The Criminal Justice Planning Committee has also been participating in the development of plans for county-wide centralization of criminal records and warrants; for a central emergency radio dispatch and central emergency telephone number; for accommodation to changes in state laws concerning the handling of juvenile status offenders and delinquents; and for integration of mental health and criminal justice services in the area of family and youth problems.

"Not simply in Napa County, but in counties and cities in general, local criminal justice managers have the knowledge, expertise, and desire to make positive changes in the criminal justice system," according to Napa County Administrator Albert Haberger. "What they must be given is the opportunity to make changes through an administrative

and planning vehicle which brings them together in the development of solutions which will benefit all aspects of the criminal justice system and the public."

For further information about Napa County's program, interested readers are invited to write or call Albert J. Haberger, Napa County Administrator, 1115 First Street, Napa, CA 94558, (707) 253-4421.